Russia Building Space A-Missile, McNamara Says

New Weapon Could Hit U.S. From Orbit

By George C. Wilson
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The Soviet Union evidently is testing a new weapon which could bomb the United States from outer space as early as 1968, Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara said yesterday.

A giant rocket—in the system he believes the Soviets are building — would evade America's main warning network by flying three-quarters of the way around the earth and approaching the United States from the south.

"I'm not concerned" about the new development, McNamara said.

Although evading our big radars could reduce the warning time from the present 15 minutes to as little as three minutes, McNamara said a new radar going into operation would close the detection gap.

He added that the new Soviet weapon would not be accurate enough to destroy hardened U.S. Minuteman ICBM bases. Therefore, McNamara said, the U.S. deterrence is not reduced.

Also, the Secretary declared, the U.S. has been testing antisatellite weapons which could knock down the Soviet orbital weapon under certain conditions. But he said the U.S. could not protect its cities against any massive Soviet attack.

Estimates of Size

McNamara estimated that the Soviets could launch a one- to three-megaton bomb from this orbital rocket. Other sources estimate the bomb could be as big as 30 megatons.

These yields compare to the one-megaton warhead on the Minuteman, the basic U.S. intercontinental ballistic missile.

McNamara called the new weapon "a Fractional Orbital Bombardment System, or FOBS." The term stems from the fact that the bomb would most likely be launched before the system made a complete orbit.

Asked if FOBS violated the outer space treaty recently signed by the United States and Russia, McNamara said: "No, they have agreed not to place warheads in full orbit. That is why this is a fractional orbit, not a full orbit, and therefore not a violation of that agreement."

He conceded the Soviets might let the new weapon go around the earth a full orbit or more. If they do, he said, "We will observe it. But the point is that this fractional Orbit Bombardment System is not a violation of that agreement."

Development Permitted

The space treaty, however, does not ban developing orbital weapons—as opposed to actually putting them into orbit.

Article IV of the space treaty states that signatory

See BOMB, A10, Col. 1

nations "undertake not to place in orbit around the earth any objects carrying nuclear weapons or any other kinds of weapons of mass destruction, install such weapons on celestial bodies or station such weapons in outer space in any other manner."

McNamara theorized that Russia is developing FOBS as a weapon against the U.S. bomber force. Some Air Force leaders have argued for months that such a weapon more likely would be intended for use against our missile bases and command centers.

"We suspect that the Russians are pursuing the research and development of a FOBS," McNamara said in a hastily called press conference at the Pentagon. "If this turns out to be true, it is conceivable that they could achieve an initial operational capability during 1968."

He said the United States had considered such an orbital weapon system but rejected it because ICBMs offered more advantages. He said the orbital bombs are not as accurate as ICBMs.

McNamara said the United States could develop an orbital weapon "at any time for relatively rapid deployment" but "we have no intention of revising the decision made years ago."

Russia's three-stage liquid Scrag rocket is believed to be the booster for FOBS. It presumably would be launched eastward from the Soviet ICBM complex at Tyuratam and then fly south under the earth.

The third stage of the rocket would carry the hydrogen bomb over the United States from the south. Russian ICBMs would fly over the North Pole and then Canada to hit the U.S.

Once FOBS got about 500 miles from the target, a small rocket engine would separate the bomb from the booster stage which had carried it.

Since the U.S. would not know until the last minute when and where the bomb was going to fly loose from its orbital rocket, it would be difficult to set up defenses against it and warning time would be cut from 15 minutes to three.

It would be easier to intercept FOBS in orbit before this separation with an anti-satellite weapon.

This would take a radar network which could see more than BMEWS (ballistics missile early warning system) in Greenland. The U.S. has, in fact, developed one which can "see" over the curvature of the earth and "recapture" the lost warning time, McNamara said.

He said the over-the-horizon radar has gone into operation within the last 60 days and would be fully operational "early next year."

The new radar, being built by the Radio Corp. of America, sends radio signals all around the earth by bouncing them off the ionosphere — a reflective mirror of charged particles above the earth.

The radio signals would focus on Soviet launching areas. A missile makes a wake as it zooms through the atmosphere after launch. The radio signals would bounce off this wake and go back to the over-the-horizon station in the U.S., where instruments would read the "back scatter" of signals and tell where the Soviet rocket was headed.

In a wartime situation, the United States would have to decide whether the object detected was indeed a bomb in orbit. If so, then anti-satellite weapons would have to be used to destroy it.

"We have a capability to intercept and destroy hostile satellites within certain ranges," McNamara said in his posture statement this year.

McNamara made the point that the FOBS differs from the up and down trajectory of an ICBM—which is about 800 miles above the earth at its peak. FOBS, he said, "is fired into a very low orbit about 100 miles above the earth."

The United States has tested Thrust-Augmented-Thor missiles at Kwajalein Island in the Pacific as anti-satellite weapons. But Pentagon experts concede that the U.S. satellite defenses have gaps.

McNamara said yesterday that "I don't want to imply" that the United States had any foolproof defense against a massive Soviet attack by FOBS or other nuclear weapons.

The Soviets, McNamara said in giving his theory on why they went to FOBS, "are faced with a bomber threat that is very substantial." He said the FOBS would be accurate enough to hit Strategic Air Command bases.

The Defense Secretary also said the Tallinn defense the Soviets have built across the corridor U.S. bombers and missiles would have to fly to hit the U.S.S.R. was "very clearly" designed against bombers.

There has been some dispute on this point in the intelligence community, with some officials concluding Tallinn was an extension of the Soviet missile defense.

Sen. Henry M. Jackson (D-Wash.) opens hearings on Monday on U.S. offensive and defensive weapons systems. Jackson in an interview yesterday said FOBS was one of the Soviet developments to be discussed.

The Pentagon news conference might have been called to light a back fire against these hearings.

McNamara said its timing stemmed from the fact tha it has "only been in the las month or two" that the intel ligence was substantiated. He added that classified Congressional briefings were held ir the past few days, so it wa appropriate to make the find ings public now.

Although McNamara did no say so, the evidence came fror a series of 11 Soviet spac shots fired from the militar ICBM launch complex at Tyu ratam.

All 11 shots were fired a about a 49 degree angle to th Equator. The first two blev up—raising a debate amon space experts as to whethe it was accidental or on pur pose.

The shots, listed in the Satellite Situation Report published by the National Aeronautics and Space Administration and based on Air Force tracking data, were given Cosmos numbers. The dates: Sept. 17 and Nov. 2, 1966; Jan. 25, May 17, July 17, July 31, Aug. 8, Sept. 19, Sept. 22, Oct. 18 and Oct. 28.

There has been speculation in the aerospace press and other places that the Soviet Union in that series was testing re-entry vehicles.

"Even now it is impossible to be certain of what these (space) tests represent," McNamara said.

"The FOBS weapon would not be accurate enough for a satisfactory attack upon United States Minuteman missiles protected in their silos," McNamara said. "Perhaps the Soviets might feel it could provide a surprise nuclear strike against United States' soft-land targets, such as bomber base.

"However," McNamara continued, "our deterrent rests upon our ability to absorb any surprise nuclear attack and to retaliate with sufficient strength to destroy the attacking nation as a viable society.

"With three-minute warning, 15-minute warning or no warning at all," he said, "we could absorb a surprise nuclear attack and strike back with sufficient power to destroy the attacker. We have the capability today; we will continue to have it in the future."

Former Premier Khrushchev bragged about a Soviet orbital rocket code-named by NATO as Scrag.

Communist Party Chief Leonid I. Brezhnev on July 3, 1965, said the Soviet Union possesed "orbital rockets" that disproved American claims of missile superiority.

The recent series of Soviet launching and docking maneuvers are not related to FOBS, McNamara said.